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DEPT FOR A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, DRL
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [PINS](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: ABEL ALIER DECLINES ELECTIONS COMMISSION CHAIRMANSHIP

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Abel Alier informed GOSS Vice President Riek Machar Teny and GNU Vice President Ali Osman Taha on October 13 of his intention to decline the chairmanship of Sudan's yet-to-be formed National Elections Commission (NEC). Alier, currently in Juba, paid a call on Machar to deliver the news personally, and called Taha from the GOSS Vice President's office to notify the NCP of his decision. This news came one day before the National Assembly was due to reconvene in Khartoum. GoSS Vice President Machar had utilized the Sixth Annual Governor's Forum in Juba to announce that President Bashir's decree on the National Elections Commission would be tabled before the National Assembly for its approval this week - Alier's decision now makes this an impossibility. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum told CG Juba on the evening of October 13 that he met with Alier earlier that day at the direction of SPLM Party Chairman Salva Kiir Mayardit in an attempt to persuade Alier to reconsider his decision. Amum noted that, "if Alier does not reverse his decision, we have no other options." According to GoSS Minister for Presidential Affairs Luka Biong Deng, Alier's decision comes days after the NCP and SPLM acted jointly to quash a move by would-be NEC Deputy Chairman Abdulla Idris to similarly reject his position as deputy. During a CG Juba meeting with Deng on October 11, Deng claimed that NCP State Minister for Presidential Affairs Idriss Abdelgadir said on 9 October that Idris would "be handled" - forced to drop his consistent objections to the Deputy NEC Chairmanship so that the NEC could be tabled before the National Assembly this week. (Note: Idris told Embassy poloff on September 18 that he had refused the position of NEC Deputy Chairman several times in order to remain co-chairman of the National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC), despite consistent pressure from the NCP for him to take on an NEC leadership role. Idris claimed that he wanted to remain at the NCRC in order to work on drafting the referendum law that will provide Southerners with a right to self-determination in 2011. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) Pressed on what might have led to Alier's reversal (he had pledged to USAID staff in mid-September that he would gladly accept the position), Amum maintained that Alier is increasingly troubled by doubts over the depth of the NCP's commitment to free and fair elections. While Amum said Alier will publicly cite advancing age and waning energy levels as the reasons for his demurral, Alier told Amum that he saw only two elections scenarios for Sudan: a rigged-victory by the NCP, or national-level elections finally held only after Alier personally spent months hammering away at NCP intransigence and obstacles. "He does not want to be forced to confront the NCP alone," Amum said, "and he does not want to be held responsible for the mess if we were to move forward with elections in the current context," a direct reference to the myriad of existing national-level laws that continue to be in conflict to the CPA and Interim National Constitution. [Comment: At present, some of these laws -- notably the National Security Act and Media Act -- make free and fair elections a technical impossibility in Sudan and

demand reform. End Comment.]

¶4. (SBU) Amum hoped he had persuaded Alier to reconsider his decision, but was not confident that he had done so. He noted that the pair agreed to meet again on October 14 before Alier made his sentiments publicly known. Given Alier's unease about chairing a potentially illegitimate elections process, ConGen PolOff requested that Amum advise Alier of the planned U.S. commitment of \$70 million worth of USAID technical assistance to the NEC, and noted that ConGen staff stood ready to brief Alier on how such assistance could help safeguard the NEC's neutrality and expand the Commission's political heft. Amum agreed to pass the message, noting the utility of such a briefing in perhaps moving Alier toward a positive reconsideration of his position.

¶5. (SBU) In a separate meeting with SPLM Deputy Secretary General of the Northern Sector Yasir Arman in Khartoum on 13 October, Arman told poloffs that the NCP and the SPLM had agreed upon the make-up of the nine-person NEC, which the GNU Presidency planned to reveal to the Parliament this week, but that the NCP is now having "second thoughts" on the list. Arman stated that the NCP "is not happy" about having Abel Alier act as the NEC Chairman, but that it is impossible to lobby against his candidacy due to his nationally-respected status and penchant for neutrality. Arman also said that Idris has refused the position of Deputy NEC Chairman because while he is an equal with Alier in the NCRC, he would have to act as Alier's Deputy if he were to take up the NEC role. [Comment: While Arman's assessment is an interesting one regarding the dynamics between Idris and Alier, it is more likely that Idris fears a train-wreck electoral process just as much as Alier, hence his decision to decline the role of NEC Deputy Chairman. End comment).

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¶6. (SBU) Comment: While there is a mounting sense of urgency that an NEC must be agreed upon and instated soon if elections are to happen at all in 2009, uncertainty and speculation abound regarding the willingness (or unwillingness) of Alier and Idris to take up the leadership of the NEC. Given Idris' refusal of the Deputy Chair position several times and Alier's plans to turn down the Chairman role publicly on 14 October unless convinced otherwise, the future of an energetic, prepared, and nationally-respected NEC is in serious jeopardy. Embassy Khartoum will meet with Alier and Idris immediately to emphasize the importance of setting in motion the preparation for free and fair elections in Sudan as part of the implementation of the CPA. Embassy Khartoum will also highlight the importance of having NEC leaders who are viewed as capable, neutral figures respected by all political parties and civil society and will attempt to convince Alier and Idris to accept the NEC positions.

¶7. Bio Note: Alier was catapulted into the "regional presidency" following the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement that ended Sudan's first North/South civil war. A noted author of Sudanese history and the nation's present constitution, Alier is viewed equally by both the National Congress Party and Sudanese People's Liberation Movement as the lead representative of Sudanese political neutrality. Alier and Idris are co-chairs of the National Constitutional Review Commission. End Note.

ASQUINO